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A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING

At WHITEHALL,

ON

CHRISTMAS-DAY, 1696.

By the Right Reverend Father in God,

GILBERT Lord Biſhop of SARUM.

LONDON:

Printed for Ri. Chiſwell, at the *Roſe* and *Crown* in St. *Paul*'s Church-Yard. MDCXCVII.

THE

BISHOP of *SALISBURY*'s

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Gal. IV. Ver. 4.

But when the fulneſs of the time was come, God ſent forth his Son made of a Woman.

THE Myſteries of God's Providence, are of all others the moſt Amazing. A ſmall Meaſure of true Reaſon, with good Degrees of Humility and Modeſty, will eaſily bring one over to Submit to Matters of Doctrine, relating to the Divine Eſſence, if it appears that they are expreſly Re-

 vealed,

vealed, though the forming Distinct Apprehensions of them be above our Faculties, which God knows are Weak and Short-sighted; but it is a more obvious, as well as a more pressing Difficulty, that arises from the Methods of God's Governing the World. There is no great matter in that which is drawn from the Varieties and seeming Partialities of Providence: The Prosperity of Bad Men, and the Afflictions of the Just, have often such visible tendencies in this Life, and are followed with such a just Distribution of Rewards and Punishments in another State, that this is no formidable Objection.

But that the world should be, as it were, abandoned, so great a part of it being, as it were, delivered up in Bulk to Ignorance, Idolatry, Immorality, and Magick; so small a part of it being enlightned, and of that so very small a part being either guided or bettered by that Light, carries in it a Train of Difficulties, which we can never hope to see through, till we come at that Light to which we cannot now approach. Why the world was let run into so much Corruption for about 4000 Years, before the Son of God was sent forth into it; Why this Light has not Shined into all the Corners of the world ever since;

ſince; And that which is the moſt Amazing of all, is, Why do thoſe who enjoy it value it ſo little, and are ſo little reformed by it, are indeed Myſteries that we cannot ſee through.

Yet though we cannot quite comprehend them, we have ſome hints given us to ſhew us, that there was a certain Conduct, and by Conſequence a wiſe Direction in this great Tranſaction. A time was prefixed for it, long before it happened; and the Accompliſhment did punctually Anſwer the Predictions.

I ſhall name only Two of the moſt Remarkable.

About 1800 Years before it, *Jacob* when dying had foretold, *That the Scepter ſhould not depart from Judah, till Shiloh ſhould come*, by whom the *Gentiles* were to be called to the Knowledge of God. The Importance of which was, That the Tribe of *Judah* ſhould continue to be God's People, under their peculiar Laws and Government, till the Meſſias ſhould come, to whom the *Gentiles* were to be *gathered*. The other Tribes were for the greater part ſo loſt, that ſcarce any Remnant of them was left: But the Tribe of *Judah* ſtill remained a viſible Body of Men, Governed by their peculiar Laws, till Gen. 49. 10.

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the time of our Saviour's coming into the world. *Herod* had been made their King by the *Roman* Senate, and was afterwards Confirmed by *Auguſtus*; they were thereby brought under Subjection, though *Herod* Governed them indeed according to *Moſes*'s Law. *Auguſtus* ordered a Taxing of all the Empire, of the Tributary or Subjected Provinces, as well as of that which was incorporated into the Empire: And this happened preciſely at the time of our Saviour's Birth. Soon after that, *Judea* was made a Province; their Current Money was only the *Roman* Coin; *Pontius Pilate* the *Roman Procurator* Condemned our Saviour; and by that time, according to the Prediction, the *Gentiles* were called to the Knowledge of God (through this *Shiloh* the Meſſias,) the *Jewiſh* Nation was Deſtroyed, their Temple burnt down, their City razed down to the ground, and they ſcattered to the Four Winds of Heaven; but far the greater part adhering firmly to their Religion, ſtill owned the Prophecies, which we hope are to have at laſt a Glorious effect upon them for their final Converſion. Here is one Character of the Time, and we ſee the fulneſs of it was come.

Another is yet more expreſs, given out about 500 Years before the Accompliſhment; It was revealed

revealed to *Daniel*, That within Sixty nine Weeks after the going forth of the Commandment to build *and reſtore Jeruſalem*, *Meſſiah the Prince ſhould come, and be cut off*. That by *Weeks* are meant ſo many Sevens of Years, is confeſſed by the *Jews*; and can eaſily be proved to have been a common form of deſigning ſuch a Period of time among them. The *commandment to build Jeruſalem*, was given in the 20*th*. year of *Artaxerxes Longimanus*; the Edict given out before by *Cyrus*, and confirmed by *Darius*, being only for the building the Temple, and for the worſhipping of God in it. Sixty nine Weeks of Years are juſt 483: Now we have the certain Characters of thoſe times left, by which we are ſure, That from the 20*th*. year of *Artaxerxes* to the 19*th*. of *Tiberius*, in which our Saviour ſuffered, there were juſt ſo many years, neither more nor leſs, according to the Calculation of Years that we know the *Caldeans* then reckoned by, of 360 Days to a Year, which they divided into Twelve Months, aſſigning Thirty Days to every Month; which we ſee by *Jeremiah* was likewiſe the meaſure that the *Jews* counted by; and of ſuch Years only can that Prophecy of *Daniel*'s be underſtood.

Dan. 9. 25.

Neh. 2. 5, 6. Ezra. 1. 2.

Ezra 6. 8.

Here are two evident Characters that the *Fulneſs of the time* was come; that a time was prefixed to this great Tranſaction long before, and

that it happen'd punctually according to it.

We do likewiſe find in the ſtate of the *Gentile* world a great Conjuncture of favourable Circumſtances previous to its Appearance: The *Roman* Empire was as calm at this time as it was great: The World was conquer'd, and after a courſe of many years Wars *Janus* Temple was ſhut. It was a Conſtitution made up of Juſtice and Morality; but was under a Religion that was then ſo ſtrangely corrupted, that the Tempers as well as Laws of that Nation did very much diſpoſe them to an averſion to that Religion, or rather to that mixture of all Religions, which the wiſer and better ſort among themſelves could not but deſpiſe and abhor: By conſequence this prepared them to receive a Religion that not only agreed to all their Notions of Morality, but that tended to improve and exalt them all.

Thus we who cannot know why this was the time marked for the Appearance of the *Son of God*, yet do certainly know that it was preciſely marked out, and was as exactly fulfilled; and from that we have reaſon to acknowledge and adore that Wiſdom in it, which we cannot yet diſcover.

I go next to the Great Article of the Chriſtian Religion mentioned in the Text, That the *Meſ-*

ſias

sias who was *sent forth*, was the *Son of God*. The *Jews* understood these two designations to be so inseparable, that they had no other Controversy at first with the Apostles and the first Converts, but about this, Whether *Jesus* was the *Messias*, or not? But supposing him to be the *Messias*, they never questioned his being *the Son of God*; nor did they object to the Christians their giving him Divine Adoration. We have the Martyrdom of St. *Stephen* the most punctually related of any of all the Passages that happen'd in the first beginnings of Christianity: The *Jews* heard and saw all that past; St. *Stephen* died calling upon the *Lord Jesus to receive his spirit*, and praying to him not to *lay that sin to the charge* of his Murtherers. If the *Jews* had not then believed that the *Messiah* was to be truly *God*, and that as such he was to be invocated, they must after this have reproached the Christians with Idolatry; with making a Man God, and with the worshipping him as such. This they did not do; which shews that then they owned that the *Messiah* was to be truly *God*.

This was yet more instructing to the Christians, who could not but observe that St. *Stephen* ended his life in Acts of Invocation of Christ, to the same effect with those in which Christ himself had called on his Heavenly Father, when he gave

up the Ghoſt: *Into thy hands I commit my ſpirit*, being of the ſame importance with that of St. *Stephen*'s, *Lord Jeſus receive my ſpirit*: As, *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*, being the ſame Act in effect with this, *Lord, lay not this to their charge*. If Chriſt was not truly God, and to be worſhipp'd as ſuch, it is not poſſible to excuſe this from a very high degree of Idolatry.

I love not in ſuch an Audience to dwell long on Points of Speculation: Yet ſince this is the Capital Article of the Chriſtian Religion, and ſince it is one of the great Infelicities of the Age we live in, that as many have been carried to queſtion the Truth of the whole of it, ſo not a few have with a particular Eagerneſs attack'd this Fundamental Point of it; I hope the Day, as well as the Time we are in, will juſtify the inſiſting a little more upon it.

It is certain, that if we confeſs that the New Teſtament was a Book writ by Divine Inſpiration (which thoſe who deny this Doctrine, profeſs they do acknowledge), we muſt alſo confeſs, that Divine Honours are through the whole of it aſcribed to Jeſus Chriſt: From this, Common ſenſe ſeems to infer, That either he was truly God, by ſuch a Real Union with the *Eternal Word*, who is *God*, as makes both Natures one Perſon in him; the neareſt reſemblance to which

is the Union of our Souls and Bodies, out of which very different Natures ariſes one Man, or one Perſon: Or if this is not true, it will follow, That the Chriſtian Religion, one of whoſe main Ends was to baniſh Idolatry out of the world, did really only change the Object of this Idolatry, and draw men from worſhipping the Deities of the ſeveral Nations, to worſhip one who according to thoſe mens Doctrine was only a Creature, and yet was to be worſhipp'd with the ſame Honour which is due to the Eternal God; which were indeed a Strain in Idolatry beyond that of moſt Heathen Nations. But to make this Matter yet plainer: All the Sects among Chriſtians that have rejected our Saviour's Divinity, who yet acknowledge that Divine Honour is due to him, may be reduced to theſe Two; Either ſuch as hold him to have been ſome Excellent Created Being, made before the world, and imployed by God in Making and Governing the world, and ſo Dignified with Divine Honour. Theſe were the *Arians* of Old, who under many high words, ſeem to have meant no more but to acknowledge that he was ſome Created Mind, ſuch as the *Jews* and we all apprehend *Angels* to be; Superior indeed, in rank and order, to any other of them; but no Idea can be formed of a Created Mind,

how

how perfect ſoever, but what is of the nature of Angels.

Now St. *Paul* in his Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, begins it with the rejecting this conceit; and he purſues that in the Two Firſt Chapters, in expreſſions, that conſidering the Simplicity of Stile in which the New Teſtament is writ, are as full as can be imagined. They are of the nature of Negative words, which are always to be ſeverely underſtood. They are likewiſe ſet in the terms of oppoſition, and ſo muſt be ſtrictly expounded: The bare repeating them will make this yet more more ſenſible. It is ſaid of Chriſt,

Heb. 1. 3. *That he was the brightneſs of the Father's glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon. Being made ſo much better than the* Angels, *as he hath by Inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.* Whatſoever Dignity they have, it is a free donation,

ver. 4. whereas Chriſt has his by *Inheritance*. *To which of the* Angels *ſaid he at any time, Thou art my Son*

ver. 6, 7. *this day have I begotten thee. But when he bringeth in the firſt-begotten into the world, he ſaith, And let all the* Angels *of God worſhip him*; an oppoſition as expreſs as it is full. Theſe words are in the

Pſ. 97. 7. Book of Pſalms; but they are alſo in the Concluſion of the laſt Song of *Moſes*, according to

Deut. 32. 43. the Septuagint Tranſlation, tho' not in the *Hebrew*: *Rejoyce, O ye Heavens, and let all the Angels*

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of God Worſhip him. This being then the Tranſlation that was in uſe among the *Jews*, when St. *Paul* writ, it is moſt probable that he had regard to it, there being no part of the Law, that the *Jews* think is more full of Myſtery and Prophecy than that Song. The Angels being thus called on to Worſhip the Meſſias, is a very ſtrict Expreſſion of another nature in him, Superior to theirs, and to which they are ſubject. That is farther proſecuted: Of Angels, this is ſaid, *He makes his* Angels *Spirits* (that is, *Winds*, which imports the quickneſs of their Motion), *and his Miniſters a flaming fire* (a Figure importing their ſubtil force). In oppoſition to which, this follows; *But unto the Son he ſaith, Thy Throne, O God, is for ever and ever.---*And, *Thou, Lord, in the beginning haſt laid the foundation of the Earth, and the Heavens are the works of thine hands;--they ſhall be changed, but thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall not fail.* The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth, and Eternity, being in theſe words plainly affirmed of the Meſſias, which could not be ſaid without Blaſphemy, if he was not truly God. This is carried yet further: *To which of the Angels ſaid he at any time, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footſtool;* in oppoſition to which, it is ſaid further of Angels, *Are they not all miniſtring Spirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them*

Heb. 1. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

ver. 13, 14.

them who ſhall be Heirs of Salvation. This is more expreſly proſecuted in the next Chapter, where this is made a part of the difference between the Heb. 2. 2, 3, 4. Moſaical and the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, That the former *was ſpoken by Angels*; whereas this was *firſt begun to be ſpoken by the Lord. For unto* Angels *God hath not put in ſubjection the world to come* (a Phraſe importing in the *Jewiſh* Stile, the Diſ- ver. 5. 7. penſation of the Meſſias); whereas the Meſſias, *though made a little lower than the Angels, was crowned with glory and honour, and ſet over the* whole Creation. In the Concluſion of that Chapter, there is an Expreſſion that makes all this yet more evi- ver. 16. dent; *For verily he took not on him the nature of Angels, but he took on him the ſeed of Abraham*; which fully ſhews that the *nature* in him, which he had before his *Incarnation*, was not the *nature* of Angels.

The Second Suppoſition on which thoſe who deny his Divinity, do yet pretend to aſſert the High Dignity to which he is raiſed, is the Sublimity of that Miniſtry and Diſpenſation that was committed to him; in concluſion of which, and as a reward of his patient Sufferings, he was raiſed up, and exalted to Divine Honour. This *Artemon* of old, and the *Socinians* of late, have advanced: But, as by a Spirit of Prophecy, St. *Paul* does in the next place deſtroy this conceit in that way, which of all others, was the beſt

ſuited

ſuited to the Notions of the *Jews*. He ſets Chriſt in oppoſition to *Moſes*, not only in a priority of rank, and precedence, but in a Superiority of Nature. He Prefaces this with a charge to us, to *conſider the High-Prieſt and Apoſtle of our Profeſſion*: To which he adds, That both *Moſes* and he were *faithful*, but with this diſtinction; *That this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moſes, in as much as he who hath built the Houſe hath more Honour than the Houſe.* He adds to this; *That he who hath built all things, is God.* But the oppoſition follows; *Moſes was faithful in all his Houſe as a Servant; but Chriſt as a Son over his own Houſe.* Words that are as clear as they are full. Heb. 3. 7. ver. 2. ver. 5, 6.

To make this yet more ſenſible, it is to be conſidered, That the Degree of *Moſes*'s Inſpiration, is ſet by God himſelf above any other Prophecy, in theſe Words: *If there be a Prophet among you, I will make my ſelf known to him in a viſion, and will ſpeak to him in a dream. My Servant Moſes is not ſo, who is faithful in all my Houſe, with him will I ſpeak mouth to mouth* (or *face to face*, as one man ſpeaks to another) *even apparently, and not in dark Speeches; and the ſimilitude of the Lord ſhall he behold*: Or, to put this in Modern Expreſſions, he ſhall ſee God in a true and compleat Idea. Thus *Moſes* was above all other Prophets. The peculiar Excellencies of the *Pe al-pe*, Numb. 12. 6.

face to face, is well known to all who have any acquaintance with *Jewish* Notions. Now after all this, Christ is not only preferred to *Moses*, but is put in such an opposition to him as is that of a *Son* to a *Servant*. These are plain and simple Authorities, that need only a little Reflection, but no Commentary, to make us apprehend the force and evidence that is in them. God be thanked, that by his good Providence, and the care of all the Churches, we have this Book brought down to us, in its first genuine and uncorrupted State, in which the Inspired Penmen delivered it to the World. It was the interest of the Enemies of this Doctrine, to endeavour to corrupt it. They understood that, and followed it; for which we have an undeniable Testimony Recorded to us by a Writer who was too favourable to them to be declined as partial against them. It was *Eusebius*, who in his History cites a passage from a Writer in the beginning of the 3d Century, believed to be *Gaius* Presbyter of *Rome*, who tells us that *Artemon*'s Disciples had endeavoured to corrupt the New Testament, but in such a manner, that as they could shew no Ancient Copies to justify their Corruptions, so they did not agree among themselves; and these Corruptions were, as he says, very strange and enormous ones. So notwithstanding

Euſ. Hiſt. l. 5. c. 28.

ſtanding all the Cry that they do now raiſe of the Corruption of the Text, we ſee who they were that begun it; but that the Church was watchful in preſerving this ſacred *Depoſitum*, and did early detect this Impious piece of Fraud, and ſtopt it in its firſt beginnings.

If any ſhall ask, *How can theſe things be?* It muſt be Anſwered, *We cannot tell*: We can form no diſtinct apprehenſions concerning them. This is *Wiſdom* indeed, in a Myſtery: It is *Wiſdom*, becauſe it comes from God; but it is *in a myſtery*, becauſe we cannot attain unto it. Can we apprehend Eternity, or God's being every where? and that in one ſingle act he ſees all things paſt, preſent, and to come? Can we form any diſtinct thought concerning Creation? How Beings ariſe out of nothing, in conſequence to the Will of an Infinite Mind, who ſaid of all things, *Let them be*, and they were? Or can we ſo much as apprehend how Matter thus Created, ſhall move at the Act and Will of its Eternal Creator? Can Matter know that Will to obey it? Or can an Intellectual Act give Motion to inſenſible Matter? Can we apprehend the propagation of Plants, much leſs of Animals? And as to that which of all other things we perceive the moſt ſenſibly, Can we apprehend how Soul and Body dwell together? How Thought and Mo-

tion, how diſtant ſoever in their Natures, have that Union with, and Influence upon one another? How a Motion of Matter can throw an inexpreſſible Agony into a Mind; and how a Mind can command ſo many regular and unaccountable Motions of Matter, as we perceive in Memory, Imagination, and Speech; are difficulties that confound us. Theſe are ſuch plain and home convictions of the defectiveneſs of our Faculties, which can much more eaſily apprehend difficulties, than reſolve them, that it can be no juſt Objection to any part of the Divine Revelation, that it contains matters out of which great difficulties do ariſe; and that we are not able to give our ſelves any account of them. Our apprehenſions are not only finite, but very much bounded; we ſee but a very little way; and therefore we ought not to plead our want of capacity, in oppoſition to any thing that appears to be plainly revealed to us in Scriptures. When ſuch things occur to us, we ought to take the *Shield of Faith*; maintaining our ſelves with this, That the *God of Truth, who cannot Lye*, has revealed ſuch things to us; and when we are ſure of that, we are at the ſame time as ſure that it muſt be true, becauſe it comes from him: And by this we may beat back *all the fiery Darts of the Devil*; all thoſe Objections that ariſe out of a mixture of

Pride

Pride and Weakneſs; for our Faculties are as weak, as our Arrogance and Self-conceit is high. This is ſo important a part of the Chriſtian Religion, that it deſerves well to be inſiſted on, and to be made out, as much as the nature of the thing, or rather as much as our Nature is capable of.

The next thing to be conſidered, is the ends for which the Son of God was ſent forth into the World. They were certainly great, ſince ſuch extraordinary Methods were taken to promote them: When it was introduced with ſo many particular and diſtinct Predictions; when all was ſupported with ſuch a ſeries of Miracles, done not only by our Saviour himſelf, but by thoſe who were ſent in his name: The propagation it ſelf, conſidering the Inſtruments made uſe of, and the oppoſition it met with from all hands, being one of the greateſt of all Miracles. Now ſince it is unſuitable to Infinite Wiſdom, to employ extraordinary Methods for the attaining of ſome ordinary Ends, it is very juſt to conclude, That the Ends muſt be great, when the Means uſed in order to them were ſuch. They were indeed the greateſt that the humane nature was capable of: All the Principles of Natural Religion, together with the Tradition concerning the firſt beginnings of the World, were ſo corrupted, or ſo intermixed with Fables, that it was neceſſa-

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ry to reſtore theſe by a Mighty Authority. That which we call ſtrictly *Religion*, was turned wholly to Idolatry and Magick, Charm, or Superſtition. It was therefore neceſſary to raiſe up juſt and great Ideas of God, which the Philoſophers had attempted, but faintly and with ſmall ſucceſs. Barbarity and Vice had ſo over-run the World, that the plaineſt Ideas of Virtue were either quite loſt, or rendred very doubtful. Under ſuch a Corruption of Religion, it was no wonder if Atheiſm made a great progreſs, ſince few can be much concerned to ſupport a Religion that is viſibly made up of Fraud; and that may make men the worſe, but cannot make them the better for adhering to it; and ſuch was the Heatheniſh Religion. *Judaiſm* it ſelf, though ſound in its own nature, as well as Divine in its Original, yet was but low, and was become much more ſo by the increaſe of the Ceremonial part by Tradition, which ſtill as it increaſes too much, does ſink the Moral and beſt part of Religion. It being then neceſſary to free the *Jews* from their *Bondage* (which is the occaſion upon which theſe words are in this place made uſe of by St. *Paul*) as well as to deliver the *Gentiles* out of their darkneſs, which was become black and thick as *the ſhadow of death*; God ſent his Son to give the World true and high Notions of God and his Attri-

Attributes; of his Juſtice and Goodneſs more particularly; to open a way of Worſhip that ſhould be plain and ſimple; ſuitable to the Ideas of God, and to our Faculties: And to ſet ſuch Rules to mens inward Thoughts and Tempers, as well as to their Lives and Actions, as ſhould rectify Human Nature, and render mutual Society both ſafe and happy. For this end he delivered his Doctrine to his Hearers, and lived it as well as he ſpake it. If an Angel from Heaven had pronounced it, as the Law was given on Mount *Sinai*, it could not have had ſo ſenſible an effect, as when the Perſon who delivered it ſet ſuch a Pattern as gave more diſtinct Ideas concerning his end in it. In it he expreſſed what a ſort of Holineſs he came to promote: Not the Affectations of a pompous Exterior, but the real purity of genuine Virtue; of Truth and Goodneſs; of Modeſty, Humility, and Charity. Here was one great end for which the *Son of God* was *ſent forth*: A great one it was; to raiſe and reform mens Natures; to give us Noble Thoughts and Excellent Rules, as well as a clear Pattern, that can neither fail nor miſguide us.

A Second end of his Coming, was to open ſuch a Method of reconciling Sinners to God, as ſhould both render them capable of the Mercies of God, and yet give them great Impreſſions

both

both of the Guilt of Sin, and of the Juſtice as well as the Goodneſs of God. No offer of pardon at all, muſt have made men deſperate; as too Eaſy a one, muſt have made them bold in Sinning. The offer of a pardon was neceſſary to be begun with, but it muſt be made in ſuch a manner, that it might not encourage men to live on in Sin, at the ſame time that it gave them the hopes of Mercy. The Ideas of the guilt and odiouſneſs of Sin were to be kept up in a Religion whoſe chief deſign was to reform and purify Mankind, at the ſame time that a general offer of a pardon was to be proclaimed to the World. Therefore this Meſſias, who was to procure that offer to be made, was to become a *Sacrifice* himſelf in our *name* and *ſtead*, he was to *bear our Sins, and ſo to take them away*: He was not to be brought by Prieſts, to be offered up on an Altar, as the Heathens did with their Piacular Victims; much leſs was he to Slay himſelf, according to ſome Stories that the Heathens had. Every thing in him was to be innocent, as well as great; ſuch as became both the Majeſty of God, and the Purity as well as the Dignity of his Perſon. He was therefore fallen upon by an enraged multitude, who to ſatisfy their own brutal fury, firſt treated him moſt barbarouſly, and then put him ignominiouſly to death; all which he who could have

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ſaved himſelf by Miracle, if not by other ways, not only bore patiently, but with an intire ſubmiſſion to the Will of God, and an unconquerable Charity towards even thoſe his Perſecutors.

This was only the outſide, and the viſible part of his Sufferings; but with theſe he endured an inexpreſſible Agony in his mind, both before and during his being on the Croſs, of which we who underſtand only the Agonies of guilt, of pain, or of paſſion, can form no diſtinct Idea. All this he offered himſelf to bear; he was not ſurprized in it; he foreſaw it coming, and longed for it. It is by this, and on the account of it, that Sinners are encouraged to come to God, and to claim their pardon. In this they find great Characters, ſetting forth both the Guilt of Sin, and the Holineſs, the Juſtice, as well as the Goodneſs of God. By ſuch a Ranſom it appears, how hateful a thing Sin is, ſince God has thought fit to offer the pardon of it, in ſo ſolemn and ſo ſevere a manner. By this the Doctrine of the Meſſias has this moſt effectual recommendation accompanying it, that he ſhewed he loved us, in inſtances beyond imagination, as well as expreſſion.

A Third deſign upon which God ſent forth his Son, was to bring men to awaken much within themſelves, the Ideas of God in the ſerioueſt and tendereſt manner, by frequent Meditation, and

earneſt Prayer: To which he added the moſt encouraging of all Promiſes, That God will not only hear, but anſwer our Prayers; and more eſpecially that he will give his *holy Spirit to every one that asks it.* Our Faculties are not only under a great depreſſion, but a vaſt diſorder: Appetite and Paſſion do ſoon fire us, and are not eaſily reſiſted; we may have ſome good Minutes, but we have many more weak and bad ones: We do plainly perceive that without ſome inward aſſiſtance to cure and rectify our Nature, we cannot go through with the buſineſs of Religion. Our Saviour has aſſured us of this; and he has made the condition of our attaining it, to be that which is both in it ſelf eaſy, for nothing can be eaſier than to have a thing for the asking, and is the propereſt Method poſſible, to keep alive in us great and powerful impreſſions of God; which are the Seeds and Principles that muſt reform our Natures, and mould them unto the likeneſs of God.

Before the Son of God was ſent forth, there were ſome general Ideas of God's hearing and anſwering of Prayer, and of his furniſhing his Worſhippers with an inward aid. But it was our Saviour only, who made it a part of the Covenant that he came to eſtabliſh between God and man, That a Divine Power ſhould be conveyed into the Faculties of all ſuch as ſhould earneſtly pray

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to him, by which they ſhould be enabled to pay him that ſincere Obedience, of which he is pleaſed graciouſly to accept; and in conſideration of which, he does through the Merits and Interceſſion of Chriſt, pardon all our other errors and defects. This is now to us, a fœderal promiſe; we may depend upon it, and with all humble confidence claim to it.

The Fourth great deſign of God's, in ſending forth his Son, was, That he might give the World the moſt powerful of all motives, to work either on their hopes, or fears, by offering them both a full aſſurance, and a particular deſcription of a Future State. Some notices of this were ſtill in the World; but they were both doubtful and dark: The greateſt Aſſertors of it among the *Greeks* and *Latins*, did it but faintly: They propoſed it, rather as an opinion that was highly probable, and fit to be believed, than as that which was certainly true. The hints given of it in the Old Teſtament, are very general, and may be made capable of other ſenſes: By it the *Jews* might be inclined to believe not only another State, but the Reſurrection of the Body; but the account they contain of it, is very defective. Our Saviour brought it to Light; he not only affirmed it in many expreſſions, that were ſo full and ſo plain, that it is not poſſible to doubt any

longer about it, without rejecting his Authority: He gave a very expreſs proof of the poſſibility of the Reſurrection, by his own riſing from the dead: He went further, and aſſured us, that we ſhould then be made *like unto Angels*: That our *Bodies ſhould ſhine as the Sun*; that we ſhould be *for ever with God, inheriting that Kingdom which was prepared for us*; previous to this, he told us, That *we ſhall hear his voice*, by the power of which we ſhall be raiſed out of our Graves, and be judged according to all that we have done in this Life; and that the *wicked ſhall go into everlaſting puniſhment, and the righteous into life eternal.*

This being then ſo evidently delivered, and ſo fully deſcribed by him, we have in it given to us *exceeding great and precious promiſes*, with the greateſt encouragement poſſible, to undertake that courſe of Holineſs, which he has ſet before us, in conſideration of the glory which, with it, he hath alſo ſet before us. We are aſſured by him, that if we go through Life in an imitation of his Example, and an Obedience of his Laws, as well, as in a ſubmiſſion to thoſe Sufferings by which he may think fit to exerciſe our Faith and Patience, we ſhall at laſt eſcape out of this evil World, and from theſe Vile Bodies: We ſhall ariſe above the depreſſions of Senſe and Imagination, and the diſorders of Appetite and Paſſion. We

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ſhall drop our Bodies with all the neceſſities and weakneſſes that hang about them; and ſhall ariſe into a ſtate of pure and clear light; into a ſtate of purity and perfection; into the fellowſhip of Angels and Saints, and be brought to ſee and enjoy God to all Eternity; And that too, with all the fulneſs of comprehenſion, as well as of joy, that our Faculties in their utmoſt enlargement and elevation are capable of.

Theſe are the hopes that the Son of God has given us. I will not turn the proſpect, and give the black face of that diſmal Eternity, which he has at the ſame time denounced againſt the impenitent. The joy of this Day agrees not ſo well with that, as with the other more lovely and more animating proſpect; which we ought to carry ever in our Thoughts, that ſo we may *lay hold on that eternal life*, which he who *cannot lye has thus ſet before us.*

Theſe are the great ends for which *God ſent forth his Son*: They are all worthy of God, as they are the greateſt that the Human Nature is capable of. But what are we the better for all this, if we come not under the influences of it; if we are only brought to have chaſter thoughts of the Divinity, a decenter way of Worſhip, with correcter Expreſſions, and more reaſonable Opinions, but come not under the vital Energy of it?

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If neither our hearts nor our lives are made the better for it, we do very little conſider or purſue the ends for which the Son of God was ſent into the World. Can we imagine that all this was deſigned for no higher end, than to bring men under ſome forms, and to bind them to ſome opinions? This amounts to little, and muſt needs give but a mean Idea of a Religion, that with how much pomp ſoever it might be introduced, ſeems now to have very little effect on the great numbers of thoſe who profeſs it. This alone diſpoſes the World more to doubt of it, than all that prophane minds can draw from any part of it, as a prejudice againſt it: Then ſhall theſe be the moſt effectually confuted, when the World ſhall ſee many inſtances of ſuch true Chriſtians, over whoſe Thoughts and Actions this Religion bears ſway. Human Nature is too univerſally corrupted, to expect great numbers of ſuch; but a happy mixture of ſome of theſe among the Crouds of thoſe who are called Chriſtians, but are the reproaches of their Profeſſion, would give another air of Authority to all that we can ſay in behalf of our Faith; If we could at the ſame time appeal to ſuch who are the living Apologies for Religion.

This ought to be the noble Ambition of thoſe, whom God has eminently diſtinguiſhed from the reſt

reſt of Mankind, and exalted above them: To be patterns to others to follow, is an honour far beyond the Authority of Commanding them: The Examples of thoſe in great poſts, will be both followed and obſerved in that which is good, as well as in that which is bad. Happy they who live ſo as to convince the World of the power that Religion has over them; and that give ſuch an Eſſay of the beauty as well as the purity of true Holineſs, as diſpoſes the reſt of Mankind to love it as well as to follow it.

Let us all then conſider for what ends God *ſent* his *Son* into the World; that we may comply with them, and correſpond to them. Let us fill our minds with great thoughts of God, with juſt ones of our ſelves, and with the generous Principles of Virtue, even in its moſt Heroical inſtances. Let us ſtudy the Doctrine of Chriſt, that we may be enlightened by it, and have it in all its branches diſtinctly before our thoughts, and in our memories; that ſo we may ever know how to conduct our ſelves by it: And let the pattern of our Saviour's holy Life and Deportment, be ever as a Picture before us, that we may always ſtudy and copy after it. Let the Meditations of what he ſuffered for us, and for our Sins, be ever tender upon our minds; to humble us when we reflect on our Sins; to give us

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deep horror for what is paſt, and great caution for the future: That ſo we may learn to value thoſe Souls that were to be purchaſed at ſuch a price, as well as theſe Sins that were to be expiated by ſuch a Sacrifice. Let us not ſink under the ſenſe of our frailty, ſince we have great aſſiſtances at hand, ſuch as will ſtrengthen us againſt all difficulties, and will enable us to reſiſt all temptations, and in the end to be more than Conquerors. All this is offered to us through him, in whom, as *the fulneſs of the Godhead dwelt bodily*; ſo out of that *fulneſs* we ſhall all receive *grace* proportioned to our occaſions, to our neceſſities, and to thoſe ſervices in which we are to be imployed.

Finally, Let us with joy look beyond Life and Mortality, and all the fading glories of this World: Thoſe ſcenes that change ſo often, and ſo ſuddenly. Let us look beyond Senſe, and Matter, and all that train of Vanity and Vexation that accompanies them, unto thoſe Regions above, where dwelleth Light and Love, and Life for evermore. Let us look unto *Jeſus the Author and Finiſher of our Faith*, whom God ſent forth into the World, to ſeek and ſave loſt Sinners, of whom we ought to reckon our ſelves among the Chief. *To whom with the Father and the H. Ghoſt, be all Honour and Glory both now and evermore.*

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